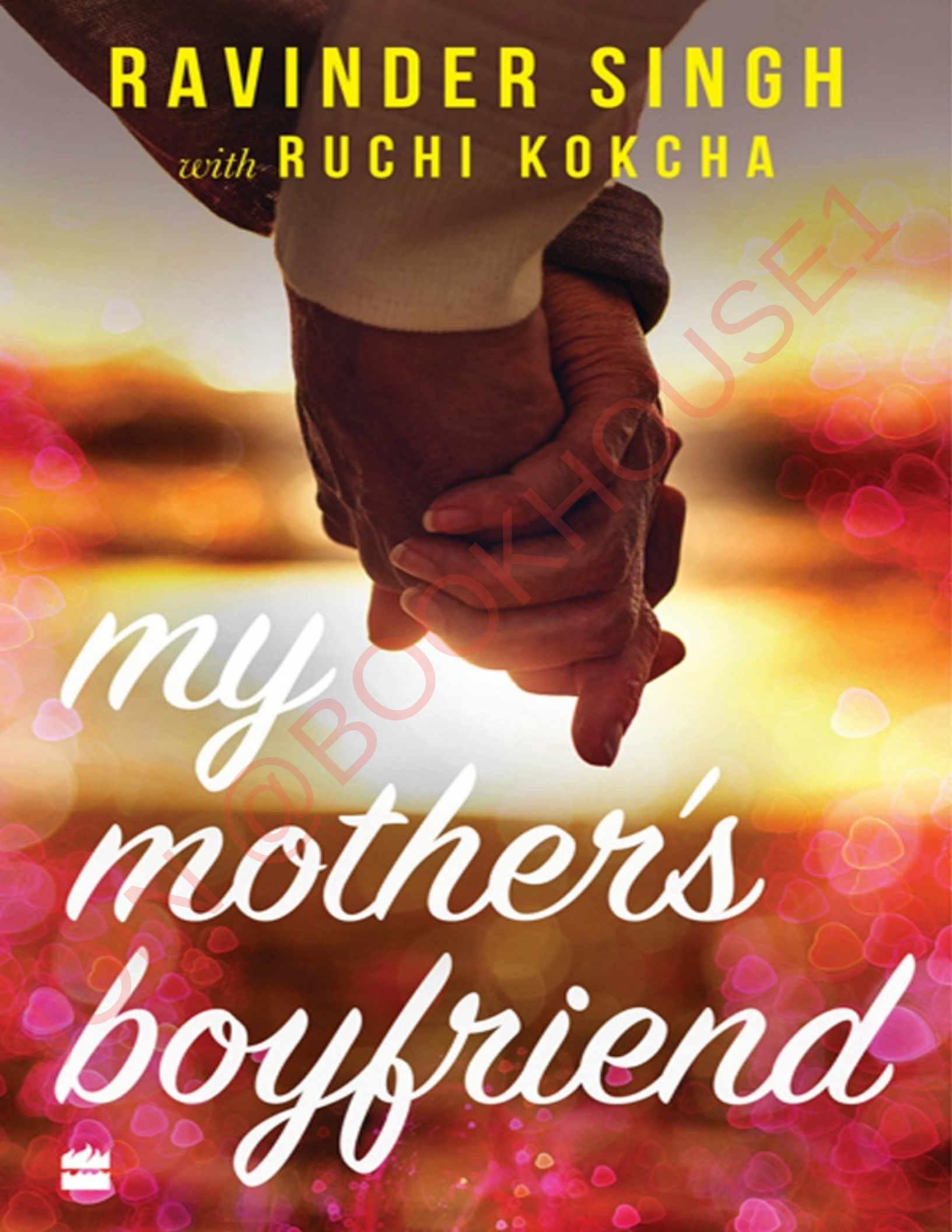
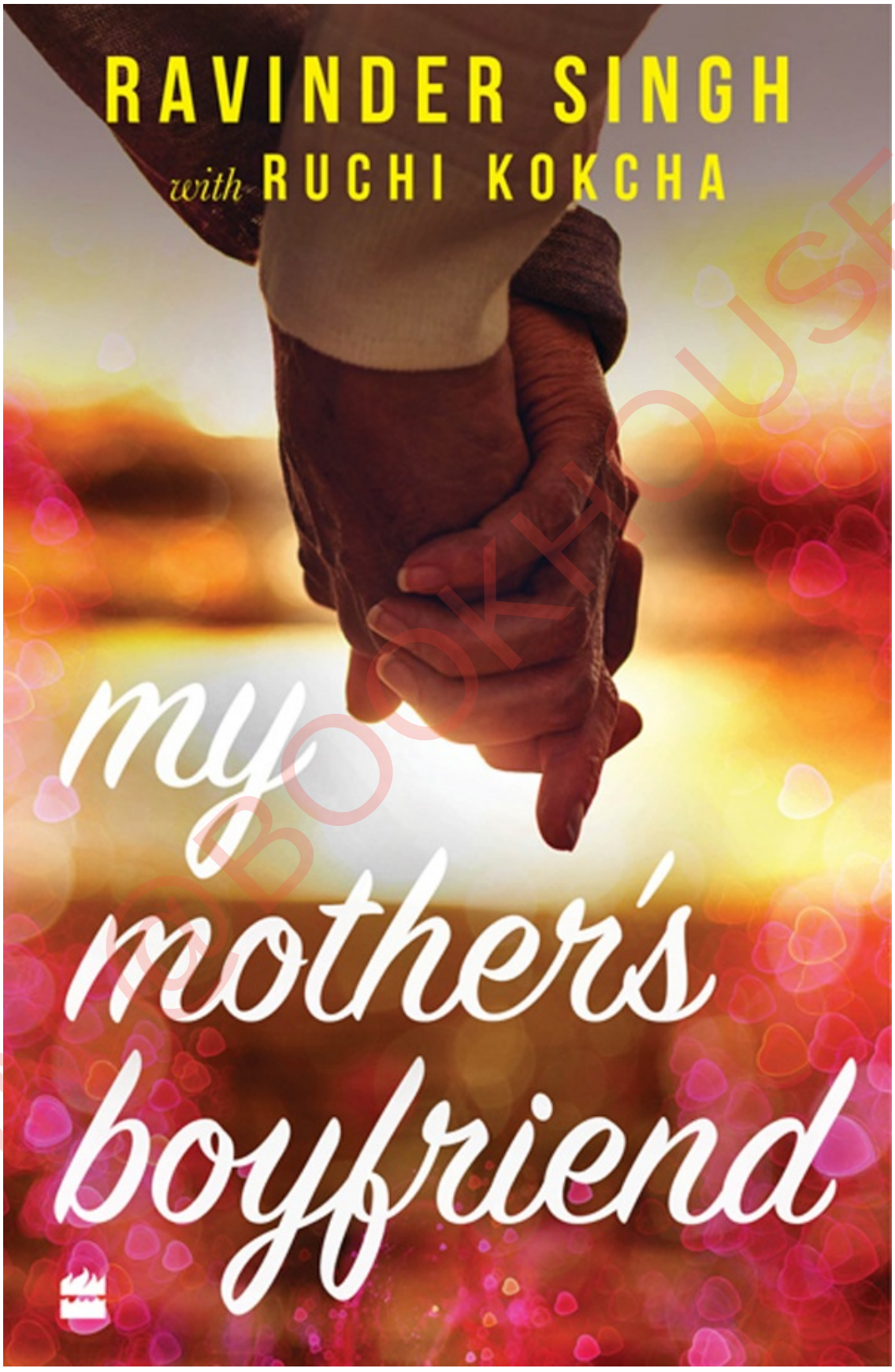

RAVINDER SINGH
with RUCHI KOKCHA
my mother's boyfriend

VISIT…



JOY BOOKHOUSE1

My Mother's Boyfriend

RAVINDER SINGH

with RUCHI KOKCHA

HarperCollins *Publishers* India

JOIN @BOOKHOUSE1

Contents

My Mother’s Boyfriend

About the Author

Copyright

JOIN @BOOKHOUSE1

My Mother's Boyfriend

In the last three weeks, I haven't needed to set a morning alarm for myself. The sound of the loud and hearty laughs coming from the senior citizens' laughter club, having its early morning sessions in the park, have woken me up every single day, way before my usual time. In the beginning, it was kind of irritating, but now I've gotten used to it.This morning too, I woke up to the sound of the laughter. I left my bed and went straight to the balcony that faces the central park. My mother knew my routine and had kept my coffee mug ready on the table. She, too, stood in the balcony while she sipped her tea, gazing at the people in the park. Both of us watched as they flung their arms up and let out hearty laughs. A faint smile appeared on my mother's lips, a change from her usual straight-faced demeanour.'Why don't you join the club?' I asked, dropping an impulsive kiss on her forehead.'Nah,' she replied quickly, as if she had already known what I was going to say.

'But why not?' I pressed. 'You are free and meeting new people will be good for you.' She did not reply; instead, she continued to stare out into the park, at the group of people whose lives appeared to be so very different from her own. Divorce at fifty-four had broken my mother completely. I could never wholly process the extent to which my father had damaged our family.

My parents were college sweethearts. They had fought against all odds to get married. Things had been tough for them to start with, and my father had struggled a lot in the beginning to set up a stable business. Through it all, my mother was the one who had stood by him, rock solid in the face of adversities. She was the one who had infused strength in him when he was at his lowest. She was as educated as he was, and

JOIN @BOOKHOUSE1

having a naturally spectacular understanding of business, had guided him well, both professionally and personally.Twenty-four years later, my father told her that he had fallen for his secretary, a woman half his age and nowhere close to my mother in calibre. He had left home and started living with the secretary. My mother had taken the news silently, and with grace. Being a woman who had an immense amount of self-respect, she was not one to beg my father to stay with us. ‘If he wants to stay with us, he will come on his own,’ she would tell me whenever I asked her about Dad and wanted her to call him back.

Seven months after first moving in with the secretary, my father had filed for a divorce. It was this blow that broke my mother completely.I still remember the day she received the divorce papers. I was having my breakfast before leaving for work. She was in the kitchen, packing lunch for me, when the doorbell rang. She gestured to me to continue eating and went to answer the door herself. It was a courier for her.She tore open the yellow, official-looking envelope carefully and pulled out the papers from inside. Before I could have asked her what they said, she had collapsed to the ground.It turned out to be a minor heart attack and was followed by a long spell of depression. Every day, I watched my mother falling deeper into the maze of her own unhappiness. I realized that I had to do something about it.And then, both her doctor and her therapist advised a change of place for us. ‘Distancing yourself from the source of the depression can work wonders,’ her therapist had said, and her doctor had seconded the idea.Maybe they were right. It was Mom who had turned our house in Delhi into a home. It was she who had put it together, piece by piece, for Dad and for me. She had invested all of her time, her energy, her entire life into making sure that this home would stay a home forever. It was the place where both Mom and Dad had made their vows to each other, of an eternal togetherness, come what may. It was on the veranda of this house, that Mom had sat with Dad during the long hours of the evening, dreaming about their retirement days, wondering about how then, they would have all the time in the world for each other.And now, it was all gone, vanished into thin air. My mother’s whole life had turned upside down in the blink of an eye.I was a firm believer of the fact that when nothing was going right, one had to find the left turn. I had been working in the hospitality industry. I was part of the HR department, at a junior level, of the Bhaarat Group of Hotels – a leading five-star hotel chain in the country. Apart from my desk job, my work involved travelling often to the group

JOIN@BOOKHOUSE1

hotels located in different cities across the country. This meant that it was possible for me to do the work I did in Delhi from a different city within the same company.So I spoke to my boss about a Goa proposal I had turned down two months back. While the compensation had been higher and it was a good opportunity, back then I had turned it down in order to be able to stay with Mom in Delhi. But now, I had a different plan.Mom was reluctant at first. She didn't want to be uprooted from the place where she had spent all her life, and where she felt like she truly belonged. But I was adamant. I knew that this would be the right thing for her.Within a month, we had moved from Delhi to Goa. I had rented an apartment in a gated society in north Goa. After that, we got busy setting up our home and settling down. The transition kept us busy, so much so that we didn't feel Dad's absence as acutely, not at least for the time being.

Three weeks into our move to Goa, I got back home on a late evening to find our front door wide open. I stepped inside and saw a man sitting on the sofa. Just then, Mom came out of the kitchen with a tea tray in her hand. The man introduced himself as Mr D'Souza and said that he lived in one of the buildings in our society; he was also one of the RWA members. I realized I had seen him a couple of times in our complex. Mr D'Souza had come over to invite us to the society's New Year party.

'We have planned something special for you, since your family is the newest member of the society. So, how many people should I add to the guest list from your side? Three?' he asked me as I sat down across from him.

The smile that had been on Mom's face all this while, vanished instantly. I was irritated by the man's presumptuousness and tried hard to maintain my cool.

'No, just the two of us,' I clarified in a curt voice and got up to go to my room.

'I am extremely sorry!' Mr D'Souza was immediately contrite. 'Please do come to the party, both of you,' he said, looking at both of us and smiling.

Mom returned the gesture with a forced smile.

Back in my room, I was still a bit agitated, despite his apology. *Why must people make assumptions?*

I was lying on the bed, when, a little while later, after Mr D'Souza

JOIN@BOOKHOUSE1

had left, Mom walked into my room.

'Should I make you some coffee?' she asked.

'No, I don't feel like it. I ate an early dinner at the hotel. I am not even hungry,' I replied and closed my eyes.

Perhaps noticing that I was slightly anxious, Mom sat on the bed and began to gently stroke my head. I fell asleep in no time.

After what seemed to be like a short while, I was woken up by the sound of laughter. Still half-asleep, the sound rung in my ears and I wondered what the laughter club was doing having their meeting in the middle of the night. I covered my head with a quilt that had appeared magically sometime during the night. But when it didn't come to my rescue, I threw it aside and headed to the balcony, only to realize that it was dawn and I had slept deeply through the night. Mom was sitting in the balcony, looking out at the laughter club's morning session.

The next second, I noticed Mr D'Souza. He was standing right at the centre of a circle that had been formed by the other members of the club. With his arms thrown up, he let out a thunderous guffaw and everyone else followed.

I looked at Mom. Judging by the look on her face, I could tell that she was really enjoying watching these sessions. I wished she'd join the club. I wanted her to immerse herself into anything that could bring her happiness.

'You should go Mom,' I said, resting my hand on her shoulder.

'Oh, you're up?' she asked, noticing me. She reached out and ruffled my hair affectionately.

'Mom, you should join them,' I repeated.

'What will I do there?' she asked.

'You'll do whatever they are doing.'

But she didn't join the club. For the next few days, she continued to merely watch their sessions from our balcony. Every time I would sit with her, I'd insist that she attended the sessions.

Then, one morning when I woke up, I did not find her in the balcony; she was not to be found anywhere else in the house too. The breakfast was ready on the table – hot idlis in the casserole and coffee in the flask. Just as I poured my coffee in the mug, I heard the sound of laughter float in from outside. I went to the balcony and looked out into the park.

There stood my Mom, with the other members of the club. She had on her brown salwar kameez and she had knotted her dupatta to her side. On her feet were the Nike shoes I'd gifted her a year ago; they were

JOIN @BOOKHOUSE1

finally being put to use. She looked exactly the way she did in one of the photos from her college days, playing badminton.

As I watched her, a tad nervous, I saw her smile and raise her arms into the air, and then bring them down, holding them parallel to the ground. My nervousness turned to joy and my eyes welled up. She looked so happy.

After that day, the morning laughter club became part of my mother's daily routine. Every morning when I'd wake up, I would find my breakfast waiting on the table and Mom in her morning session. And there was such a change in her! She began to exude positivity, so much so that it even began to affect me, staying with me for the rest of the day. There was always a bright smile on her face and that made me forget all my own worries. After a long time, home began to feel like home again.Mom had joined the laughter club's WhatsApp group. It made her more knowledgeable than me about the society and its members. She had all the information about not only the upcoming events in the society but also about every small incident that happened in the complex. She went to the kirtans and evening get-togethers organized by the society club. As she gradually came to be completely engrossed in her new life, it seemed like she was finally free from the memories of her troubled past. In a way, this released me too, from constantly worrying about her. Now I could live my own life.The purpose behind me insisting that we move to a new place had finally been fulfilled and I felt a lot lighter. I was now able to give my hundred per cent to my work. I could also now go on my work trips with an easier mind, instead of being anxious about Mom. In fact, I even began sometimes to extend my one-day trips to two, and travel to two cities instead of just one. On weekends, instead of rushing back home to be with Mom, I started hanging out with my new colleagues in Goa. I began to spend less and less time at home. I felt safe in my assumption that she was doing fine, until the afternoon I fell sick and had to come home early.As I climbed up the stairs, I heard the sound of laughter and voices from the TV, clearly emanating from my home. I figured that Mom had invited her club members over for tea. I rang the bell, and all of a sudden, the sound of laughter was replaced with an eerie silence. Unlike before, when she'd rush to the door when I returned, Mom took some time to open the door.Entering the house, I expected to be met by her entire group of friends from the club, but I saw only two people there – my mother and Mr D'Souza. There was something about the whole thing that made me

JOIN @BOOKHOUSE1

feel somewhat awkward in my own home. I wondered if it was because I was not accustomed to the presence of another man in the house.It was clear that my presence was making them feel awkward too. They had been laughing before, but from the moment I rang the bell and entered the house, the whole vibe of the house had become strained and uncomfortable.I said hello to Mr D'Souza and went straight to my room. Mom came after me. She looked nervous. I could see the anxiety clearly on her face. *I can have friends! What's the big deal? Why is he behaving this way?* –the look said.I told her I had a headache and wanted to sleep.She found me an analgesic, handed it to me and then went back outside. Moments later, the silence outside told me that Mr D'Souza had left. At first, I thought of going outside and talking to her, but then I decided to sleep on it instead. I ate my dinner in my room while watching the news on TV.The next morning, I woke up earlier than usual. As usual, my breakfast and coffee were on the table. Ignoring both, I went straight to the balcony. I looked over at the park and saw that the members of laughter club had formed a circle, holding each other's hands. I noticed that Mom was standing right next to Mr D'Souza; they were holding each other's hands too. And then, I saw her look at him and smile. He waved her hand in the air and playfully gave her a flying kiss. Mom shook her head and laughed, dismissing his antics, and then looked the other way. The whole thing irked me. I felt nauseous.I walked back to my room. A part of me was brimming with anger, while another part was telling me to calm myself down. The thing is, when it concerns your mother, you cannot calm down. I decided to have a bath. Standing under the cold shower would perhaps help. For the first time in my life, I had no idea how to deal with the situation I was in. Who'd have known that persuading her to join the laughter club would turn out to be such a big mistake? I got ready for office and left without eating breakfast. I didn't carry the lunch box she had packed for me either. I was ashamed and angry, devastated actually. And I wanted her to know how I felt. I wanted to punish her.In the office, I could not concentrate on my work at all. All I could think about was the way D'Souza had held my mother's hand. When I remembered the look on his face, I swear that had I been there, I would have punched him. For the entire day, that scene from the morning session kept running in a loop in my mind. It troubled me. I knew that it would continue to trouble me until I found a release.That evening, I reached home in a daze. The front door was locked, and for the first time in my life, I was afraid to

JOIN@BOOKHOUSE1

ring the bell of my own home. I was afraid that he would be there again. I forced my hand up to the bell but before I could ring it, the door swung open. I guessed that Mom had been standing by the door, and hearing my footsteps, she had opened it for me.

She gave a nervous, tremulous smile, or perhaps I was imagining that. I realized that my brain wasn't processing things well and that it would be stupid of me to have any conversation with her in that state.

Once again, I went straight to my room and locked the door behind me. I could not bear the thought of saying anything to Mom that would wipe that smile off her face, even if it was a fake smile. *Why is it so difficult to talk about such things with your parents?*

After a while, Mom knocked at my door and called me out for dinner. I lied, saying that I had already eaten an early dinner at work, when the truth was that I hadn't had a bite since the previous night. It's not like I even felt like eating anything. I took a shower and got into bed, but I couldn't get to sleep. My mind kept racing.

First my Dad had an affair, and now my Mom was on the same path. This realization was eating me from within, hollowing me out. I don't know for how long I stared at the ceiling fan, but my vision slowly began to blur. I blinked and looked at my watch. It was 2 a.m. I knew Mom would have fallen off to sleep long ago. I went out of my room to see if I could find something to eat.

The light in the balcony was on, which was strange. Mom never forgot to switch off the lights. I went to the balcony to turn it off and saw Mom there. She was speaking to someone on the phone. I was taken aback, for two reasons. One, my mother never stays up past eleven. And two, that she was actually on a call at this time of night.

I went and stood in front of her. She looked up, surprised to see me there.

'Why are you still awake?' I asked, not bothering to lower my voice.

She signalled to me to speak softly, but I didn't pay her any heed. I wanted to shout on the top of my voice. I restrained myself and asked her the same question again. Without replying to me, she stood up, turned off the balcony light and went into her room.

I went after her, but she had bolted the door.

Now, I was not only angry with her but also felt rejected. The only person in my life had shut her door on me. I felt numb with shock and despair.

After a few minutes, though, Mom opened her door. I was still there,

JOIN@BOOKHOUSE1

and when I saw her, I repeated my question.

'Who were you talking to?' I shouted.

'What is wrong with you? What kind of a way is that to ask me anything?' she said.

'The way you shut the door on me was no way to behave either. Just answer the question, Mom. I am not in the mood for riddles. Please answer my question.'

'I was talking to Mrs Nair,' she replied.

'I don't believe you. What was so urgent that you had to talk to her at two in the night?' I was still screaming at her. I was burning; it felt like my body was on fire.

Mom didn't say anything. She unlocked her phone, opened the call log and banged the device on the table, right in front of me. Without any apprehension, I looked at the last call. It was an incoming one from Mrs Nair at 01:43 a.m. Back in Delhi, Mrs Nair used to be our neighbour and Mom's good friend. It turned out that her family was moving to the US and she had wanted to give Mom a call before she left.

I felt like I was drowning in shame. Without uttering another word, Mom went to the kitchen and I returned to my room. I didn't even have the courage to face her, let alone apologize to her.

The next morning, I went to office earlier than usual. There was a lot of pending work that needed to be finished before lunch. By evening, I was exhausted. When I reached home, the door was already open. Mom was sitting on the couch, watching something on TV. I went and sat near her on the floor. She didn't move. I buried my head in her lap and wept.

Worried, she held me in her arms and called my name as she patted my back, running her hand over my cheeks and wiping off my tears. Once I was calmer, she kissed my forehead and it made me feel like everything was all right, that perhaps I was the one overthinking everything.

Days passed. I had almost forgotten about this episode when one day, I went to office forgetting my pen drive at home. I went home after lunch to collect it, as there was a presentation saved on it that I had to make the next day and there were some final touches left to be made on it.

When I reached the complex, I saw a group of young boys from the society loitering outside my building. As I passed them, I observed that they were looking at someone. I also overheard them making some lurid remarks about the person in question and giggling. When, out of

JOIN@BOOKHOUSE1

curiosity, I turned to see who they were talking about, my heart stopped. I saw my Mom and Mr D'Souza entering our colony through the second gate; they were, each carrying a grocery bag.

Clearly, the boys weren't aware that I was related to the woman they were laughing at. We hadn't been living in the society long enough. I saw red. I wanted to break their jaws. Instead, I ran towards Mom.

Mr D'Souza was trying to take Mom's grocery bag from her hands, but she was resisting. He was persistent and eventually managed to convince her to release her grip on the bag. Just then, I reached them and snatched the grocery bag from Mr D'Souza's hand. Then I held Mom's hand and pulled her away, walking rapidly towards our building.

Mom had been rendered silent, shocked by my behaviour. I heard Mr D'Souza call not my name.

I turned around. 'Don't! And don't you ever come near my Mom. Ever again!' I said aloud.

Mom tried to calm me down, but I didn't hear her. Pulling her along, right in the middle of our society, I got her to the elevator of our building. In the elevator, I made her swear on me that she wouldn't meet this man ever again.

'Promise me, Mom,' I said, over and over again.

'What? But why? What has happened to you?' she asked, bewildered.

'I don't know, I don't like him. That's it.'

'But why don't you like Mr D'Souza?' she asked, confused.

'Stop uttering his name, Mom!' I screamed back. My mother was stunned.

'I don't know the reason I don't like him. I just don't like him. And that's it,' I added, coldly.

In my heart, I knew that I didn't want to lose another parent to somebody else. But I couldn't say that to Mom.

Shocked at the way I had reacted, she did as I said, but her tears proved to me that she was indeed having an affair with Mr D'Souza. I could see it in her eyes. It was absolutely clear. There was no need to clarify anything. The fact that she didn't even attempt to defend herself, proved that I had been right about them from the beginning.

I was disgusted. How could Mom do this with such ease? Had she always been this shallow? Or was she foolish enough to think that they were really in love? Well, whatever it was, it was totally unacceptable to me.

For days after this, my mother and I didn't speak to each other. I did

JOIN@BOOKHOUSE1

notice that she wasn't eating properly, but my ego wouldn't allow me to show her any concern. I was deeply hurt, still very angry. She should have thought about me, but instead she had thought about herself.

I knew that both of us were going to take time to heal. Meanwhile, I had begun to wonder if, perhaps, moving to Goa had not done more harm than good. At least, in Delhi, the bond between Mom and me was strong.

Almost a month passed. Mom had grown thinner and begun to look pale again. She wasn't eating well. She had long stopped going to the morning sessions of the laughter club. She didn't even go out to the balcony to watch the sessions. In one of our monosyllabic conversations, I found out that she had also exited the laughter club's WhatsApp group. It pained me to see her unhappy; but what pained me even more is that I did not know how to fix things. I knew that things between us had been severely damaged.

Meanwhile, the workload in office was increasing; I had more responsibilities than I had had before. I was now travelling every week, flying out every Thursday and returning home on Friday evenings.

During one such business trip to Chennai, my Mom called me while I was in a meeting. I disconnected the call. Minutes later, there was another call from an unknown number. I disconnected that too and put my phone on silent mode. Meanwhile, Mom left me a text. I ignored it, deciding to read it later. As the day progressed, I got even more occupied with work and consequently, it completed slipped my mind. It was not until later that night, when I was in bed in my hotel room, that it came to me that I had not read her text.

Although the message had come from my mother's phone, it wasn't she who had sent it.

Rajni collapsed. She is admitted in JGN Hospital. Come back asap. – K. D'Souza , it read.

I jumped out of my bed. It was 11:30 at night. I immediately called on Mom's number, but no one picked up. Panic-stricken, I trembled, and my mind was filled with horrible thoughts. I didn't know what to do. I started walking up and down the length of the room, tried her number again, but in vain. Then I checked online for the next available flight to Goa. It was at 7:30 a.m. I was about to book it when my phone rang. It was an unknown number.

I immediately recognized the voice on the other end. It was Mr D'Souza.

JOIN @BOOKHOUSE1

Mom had been admitted in the ICU. He was at the hospital. He told me how she had collapsed in the balcony and how, when the top-floor kids discovered her on the floor, they had had raised an alarm. They had to break into the flat to take her to the hospital.

'How is she doing now?' I asked.

'She .... uh … she is a bit critical. That's what the doctors said,' he said.

'Can I talk to her? Is she conscious?' I asked, and realized that I was crying. Tears were streaming down my cheeks.

'Phones aren't allowed in the ICU, and she is not completely conscious,' Mr D'Souza said, and then, in a kinder voice, added, 'But try not to worry. I will make you talk to her as soon as I can.'

I told Mr D'Souza that I was taking the first flight back home and would come straight to the hospital from the airport. I could not say anything more. I didn't know what to say. He told me that he was going to spend the night at the hospital and that I could reach him anytime I wanted to. That he was there and she was not alone, was the only piece of comfort I could hold on to until I reached Goa.

I could not stop my tears even after landing in Goa, or while climbing the hospital staircase to reach the ward where Mom was admitted. I ran straight into Mr D'Souza.

'She is out of danger' were his first few words. He said them even before I could reach him. He had seen me running towards him. I was crying.

'Are you sure?' I asked earnestly. I had to be sure.

He smiled and nodded. I broke down, weeping inconsolably, and he enveloped me in a hug as he patted my back.

In that moment, I thought of all the ill will I had borne this man and felt ashamed of myself. He had been there for Mom when I couldn't. He had stayed with her the entire night at the hospital. He had called the ambulance and got her to the hospital in the first place. Had he not been there, I could not even bear to think of what might have happened.

Breaking our hug, I faced him with folded hands and asked him to forgive me.

'I am so sorry. I misunderstood you. I thought you were just…' I began, my voice thick with tears.

'Shhhhh…' He stopped me from completing my sentence and placed his hand on my back. 'Let's go meet your Mom first,' he said.

I wiped off my tears as we walked to her room. Mom was in bed. Her

JOIN @BOOKHOUSE1

IV fluid drip was on. As soon as she looked at me, she gave me a faint smile. I went straight to her and held her arms.

'How do you feel?' I asked.

She could barely speak. She briefly closed her eyes and nodded with a tiny smile. That was more than enough for me. I squeezed her wrist to ensure her that it was all fine now, that I was there for her now.

Her eyes moved from me to Mr D'Souza. He smiled back at her.

A day later, Mom was discharged. Two days after she was brought home, I realized Mr D'Souza had not paid her a visit. I recalled how I had shouted at him asking him to stay away from our home. And on top of that, I had made Mom swear that she'd never meet him again. I felt sick with guilt. I decided to pay him a visit.

When I rang the bell to his house and he opened the door, I noticed that he'd been in the middle of cooking his food. A month back, when Mom had first told me about him, she had mentioned that he was a widower. It had never crossed my mind that he would be doing all the housework himself.

'Oh hi! How's your mother now?' he asked as soon as he opened the door and saw me there.

'Hello Mr D'Souza. Well, she is doing better than she was the last time you saw her,' I said.

'Oh really? That's a wonderful news.' He gave me a big smile.

'It is, but I think you should verify that yourself.'

'What? What do you mean?' he asked.

'I mean, you should see your friend yourself and ask her about her health. No?' At first, he looked confused, and then a smile appeared on his lips. 'Oh yes.' He waited for me to say the next words.'Let's go,' I said smilingly. He was immediately ready. He walked fast; he was wearing his sandals. I found it cute. We left his flat together, and chatted all the way back to my building.A little while later, Mr D'Souza was sitting by my Mom's bed. I left them to talk to each other and came to the kitchen to make some tea for all of us. While I kept waiting for the tea to come to a boil, several thoughts passed through my mind. One of them was that I had been so very wrong to compare my Dad's affair with his secretary to my Mom's relationship with Mr D'Souza. My Dad had cheated on my mother while he had been married to her. Mom and Mr D'Souza, on the other hand, hadn't cheated on anyone. It was their solitude that had brought them together.The next time I went to Mom's room, I saw that the two were laughing, sharing an old joke from the

JOIN@BOOKHOUSE1

laughter club. It had been a while since I had seen Mom laugh like that. It had been a long time since I had felt a sense of joy that came with just seeing her happy.‘How’s your job going? And what exactly is your role there?’ Mr D’Souza asked me. I realized that this was the first time I had given Mr D’Souza enough time to speak to me and get to know me better. Earlier, I had either ignored him or demanded that he stayed away from my mother. He had only heard things about me from Mom. While we were sipping tea, another thought passed through my mind and I didn’t think twice before saying it out loud.

‘Get married,’ I said abruptly, startling the two of them.

They looked shell-shocked as they first looked at each other and then back at me.

‘What are you saying?’ asked Mom.

My eyes welled up. I nodded and repeated, ‘You two should get married.’

I could see empathy in Mr D’Souza’s eyes. He looked at Mom and smiled.

‘What made you say this, son?’ he asked, and I knew that he genuinely wanted to know the reason.

‘You make her so happy. The way you took care of her in my absence, it shows how much you love her. You are lonely and live by yourself. You two are perfect for each other,’ I replied.

Mr D’Souza and Mom looked at each other and exchanged warm smiles. He chuckled and then looked back at me.

‘Son, I am not looking to get married again in my life. And as much as I know your Mom, neither is she,’ he said as he shifted his gaze to Mom, who slowly nodded her head in acknowledgement.

‘Not that marrying the second time is not a good idea. It is. However, that’s not what we want here. I am alone, but I’m not lonely. I have made some really good friends in this society. Your Mom is one of them. And a special one, if I may say so. We share so many things from our lives with each other and honestly, I like that a lot. You see, loving someone may not necessarily be followed by giving that relationship a name. One doesn’t always mean the other. Your mom and I do not need new spouses; both of us need a companion, a friend with whom we can share what’s in our hearts and minds.’

‘And we have found that in each other,’ Mom said, interrupting Mr D’Souza. She extended her hand towards him and he held it with a smile.

JOIN@BOOKHOUSE1

‘Your Mom is an extraordinary woman. I cherish her company more than anyone else’s. I am glad that you, her son, want her to get married again. We need more youngsters like you in this society, who are sensitive towards the needs of single folks like us at our age. However, your Mom has just started to enjoy her independence. I want her to experience it instead of being bound by another social norm. Let us be ourselves. We have a limited time on this planet, anyway,’ he said, squeezing her hand.

Mr D’Souza got up from his chair to leave. He put his hand on my head and said, ‘God bless you son.’ I stood up and gave him a tight hug.

Just before he walked out of the door, he turned around and looked at Mom.

‘You have thirty-six hours to get well Rajni, because after that I am coming to pick you for the morning laughter club,’ he said.

And on that note, the three of us burst out laughing.

JOIN @BOOKHOUSE1

About the Author

Ravinder Singh is the bestselling author of seven novels and two crowd-sourced anthologies. His books have sold over 3.5 million copies to date. After having spent most of his life in Burla, a very small town in western Odisha, Ravinder is currently based in New Delhi. He has an MBA from the Indian School of Business. His eight-year-long IT career started with Infosys and ended with Microsoft, where he worked as a senior programme manager before deciding to pursue writing full-time. Ravinder has also founded and runs a publishing venture called Black Ink (www.BlackInkBooks.in), where he publishes and mentors debut authors.

Beyond his love for words, Ravinder is also a fitness freak. You can reach out to him on his Instagram handle @ThisIsRavinder or write to him at itoohadalovestory@gmail.com .

Ruchi Kokcha is a poet and passionate reader with a Masters in English Literature from Delhi University. She has taught creative writing in Hong Kong. Her debut novel, *Obsessed* , was published in 2018 by HarperCollins India.

JOIN @BOOKHOUSE1

Also by Ravinder Singh

The Belated Bachelor Party

JOIN @BOOKHOUSE1

First published in India by
HarperCollins *Publishers*
A-75, Sector 57, Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201301, India
www.harpercollins.co.in

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Copyright © Ravinder Singh & Ruchi Kokcha 2020

Epub Edition © May 2020 ISBN: 978-93-90163-90-8

This is a work of fiction and all characters and incidents described in this book are the product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Ravinder Singh and Ruchi Kokcha assert the moral right to be identified as the authors of this work.

All rights reserved under The Copyright Act, 1957. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the nonexclusive, nontransferable right to access and read the text of this ebook on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse-engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of HarperCollins *Publishers* India.

www.harpercollins.co.in

HarperCollins *Publishers*
A-75, Sector 57, Noida, Uttar Pradesh 201301, India
1 London Bridge Street, London, SE1 9GF, United Kingdom
Hazelton Lanes, 55 Avenue Road, Suite 2900, Toronto, Ontario M5R 3L2
and 1995 Markham Road, Scarborough, Ontario M1B 5M8, Canada
25 Ryde Road, Pymble, Sydney, NSW 2073, Australia
195 Broadway, New York, NY 10007, USA

JOIN @BOOKHOUSE1